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Comments at the Atlantic Council (as prepared)

April 1, 2014

Washington, DC

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen. Thanks General Jones for the introduction and Fred for the opportunity to speak today.

I'll begin with a few thoughts as both a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and then as a service chief.

First, let me state up front that I believe that our nation is at a strategic inflection point.

After 12 years of war, we are drawing down our forces in Afghanistan, resetting our military, and strategically re-posturing to the Pacific.

We are doing this in a fiscal environment that is forcing us to sacrifice our long-term health for near-term readiness...all being done in a world that is not getting any nicer.

Throughout the world, we will see increased competition for scarce natural resources, increased prevalence and severity of natural disasters ... more social unrest, cyber-attacks, violent extremism ... more regional conflicts, and the proliferation of military hardware and weapons of mass destruction. The falsely comforting state of a...“new normal” is beginning to emerge.

Because of this, my sense is that there will be no “peace dividend” following the conclusion of combat operations in Afghanistan later this year.

In fact, given our current fiscal realities Ladies and Gentlemen, we will not do less with less...we will do the same with less...all done in a world that remains very dangerous.

While our Nation may be done with the thorny and nasty entanglements of this new normal...they are likely not done with us. There will be no shortage of work for America's Marines.

Both here in the Beltway, and across the nation, there is a dialog beginning to emerge about what the American people want their military to do in the future.

After 12 years of war, some believe that it's time for America to furl the flag and come home. I understand that sentiment, and the sense of fatigue behind it. While wariness of foreign entanglements is a healthy American instinct, almost a pastime...we cannot afford to disengage from the world.

In many critical areas, only the United States has the ability and the will to lead the world through some of its thorniest challenges.

Given the fiscal realities of our budgetary challenges, the matter of priorities then takes center stage...where do we engage...and how much?

I believe that the United States must retain a global presence that deters aggression, underwrites a stable global economy...and builds trust amongst our allies and partners.

Forward presence allows us to build strategic relationships that truly matter when the chips are down...when time is short...and when lives are on the line – just like we recently saw in the Philippines and in South Sudan.

The fact is...forward-deployed naval forces are our nation's insurance policy - a hedge against uncertainty in an unpredictable world.

The Navy-Marine Corps team provides power projection from the sea, responding immediately to crisis...when success is measured in hours not days.

From the Super Typhoon that struck the Philippines late last year, to the rescue of American citizens in South Sudan over Christmas...the Navy-Marine Corps team was there ... and carried the day.

Now, I'd like to talk a bit about Afghanistan.

We Marines are coming out of Afghanistan about as well as we can expect. As far as the mission goes, we exceeded expectations!

None of us know how the future will turn out...there are simply too many variables. The entire world is watching to see how this week's Presidential elections go. This is a moment of truth for the people of Afghanistan and for the region as a whole...as it has the potential to usher in the nation's first peaceful transfer of power.

As for our continued military involvement, I believe that we need to be very circumspect, and take a lesson from our experiences in Iraq.

We spent our nation's blood and treasure there...and then we pulled out. It's yet to be seen how Iraq will turn out...we may be able to avoid the same uncertainty in Afghanistan.

In fact, I would argue that when viewing Afghanistan and Pakistan as a whole, we can't afford to simply pack up and go home.

We must remember what brought us to Afghanistan in 2001 – we went there to prevent Afghanistan from becoming a safe-haven for Al Qaeda and international terrorism.

Ladies and gentlemen, over the past decade, our presence in Afghanistan and the extraordinary efforts of the Coalition...has made a tremendous difference.

Regardless of the global landscape, it's the Marine Corps' mission to be ready.

After a decade at war in the most morally and physically bruising environment...the arena of human combat...we are resetting the Marine Corps mentally...physically...and morally.

As we prepare for future battles, your Marines are rededicating themselves to those attributes that have carried us to victory for the past 238 years...those same attributes that carried Marines

through the wheat fields and into the German machine guns at Belleau Wood in March of 1918 during WWI...those same character traits that emboldened America's first offensive in the Pacific...the attack on Guadalcanal by the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division on August the 7<sup>th</sup>...1942. That same sense of WHO WE ARE & WHAT WE DO for our country was with America's Marines at Fallujah in Iraq...and again at the Taliban strongholds of Marjah and Sangin in Afghanistan.

As an institution, we are rededicating ourselves to those timeless attributes of: *persistent discipline; faithful obedience to orders; strict adherence to standards; and concerned and engaged leadership...24/7.*

These values have defined our Corps for more than two centuries...they will serve us well as we prepare for missions to come.

Thank you Ladies and Gentlemen for indulging my opening remarks... Fred, I think this is a good time for us to open the floor to questions.

[952 words = 7 minutes]